

William H. Tracy House
5 West Mendenhall Street
Bozeman
Gallatin County
Montana

HABS No. MT-29

HABS
MONT,
16-BOZ,
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WILLIAM H. TRACY HOUSE

HABS No. MT-29

ADDRESS: 5 W. Mendenhall St., Bozeman, Gallatin County, Montana.

OWNER: Mrs. J. J. (Edna Tracy) White

OCCUPANT: Clarence H. Olson

USE: Residence

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

This house was built in 1882 for William H. Tracy, one of the earliest pioneers in the Gallatin Valley. Tracy settled on three forty-acre tracts in what is now the city of Bozeman in 1864-5. In addition to farming, he engaged in freighting goods to the new town from Corinne, Utah, before the railroad was pushed west, he operated a general merchandising store in Bozeman, and he established a brick kiln which produced 350,000 bricks in 1882 and one million bricks in 1883.

The residence was built by W. H. Babcock, another early pioneer, who served as architect as well as builder. It was described as "one of the finest in Montana". The bricks came from Tracy's own brickyard. The house, built in Victorian style, is an example of the characteristic leap from log cabins and small frame houses to mansions that marked the transition of early frontier towns to stable communities.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

William H. Tracy came to the Gallatin Valley in 1863 and helped lay out the old town of Gallatin City about thirty miles west of Bozeman. The lure of gold drew him to Alder Gulch, but the following year he returned to the Gallatin and in 1864-65, he settled on three 40 acre tracts of land that are now part of the city of Bozeman. In 1869, he returned to Illinois

to get married. He and his bride came up the Missouri by steamboat to Fort Benton, then traveled south across Montana to reach Bozeman. Their original home was on Main Street in the center of the present business district of the town.

William Tracy operated a general merchandising store in Bozeman, raising some of the produce he sold on his own farm. For several years, until the railroad reached Bozeman in 1883, he also operated a freighting line from Corinne, Utah, the nearest railroad. A brick kiln was another of Tracy's business enterprises, and it was his own bricks that were used in construction of his new home in 1882. He was active in civic affairs, and was a member of the first Board of Aldermen when Bozeman incorporated in 1883. He was also one of the directors of the Bozeman National Bank which opened in 1882.

On December 14, 1882, the Avant-Courier, a local newspaper, reported: "Mr. W. H. Tracy last week moved into his new residence on the corner of Tracy and Mendenhall Streets. The residence is one of the finest in Montana and very substantially built. Mr. Tracy is to be complimented for his enterprise in erecting so handsome a structure. No better residence has been built in Montana." The designer and builder for the house was W. H. Babcock, another pioneer who had settled in Bozeman in 1864. Babcock was a carpenter-builder who designed and built a number of substantial homes in the area during this period.

In 1885, the newspaper reported that W. H. Tracy was adding a "handsome observatory" on his residence. A painting done by Mrs. Tracy shows a cupola on top of the house; this was probably the observatory mentioned. The early photographs of the house show a "widow's walk" on the roof, while today there is nothing there. Mrs. J. J. White, the present owner and daughter of William H. Tracy, stated that the cupola was removed during a 1928 remodeling.

The house has remained the property of the Tracy family. Mr. Tracy's daughter, Edna, and her husband came there to live after the death of Mrs.

Tracy, and Mrs. White still owns the building. They did a certain amount of remodeling in 1928 by removing a wall to enlarge the parlor and install a bath downstairs, taking off the cupola, and other changes, but the house remains essentially as it was built, with the same air of graciousness and comfort.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL AND REFERENCES

Avant-Courier (newspaper), Bozeman, Montana, 1882, 1885.
Bozeman Chronicle (newspaper), Bozeman, Montana, April 16, 1908.

Houston, E. Lina, Early History of Gallatin County Montana, The Museum of the Rockies, Bozeman, Montana, 1933.

Leeson, M. A., History of Montana 1739-1885, Warner Beers & Co., Chicago, 1885.

Progressive Men of the State of Montana, A. W. Bowen & Co., Chicago.

White, Mrs. J. J. (Edna Tracy), personal interview.

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

EXTERIOR

Overall Dimensions - 34'-6" x 53'-6", excluding the front porch (not original). A one story bedroom addition was put on the west side, extending westward 12' and running 22' north and south, in 1898. A much later addition was another room on the northeast corner that was 15' x 21'-6".

Foundation - stone.

Porches - The original wooden front porch extended between the front bay windows and had the same basic form as the windows. This porch was capped by a low wooden railing that extended over the bay windows. A small semi-circular wooden porch, 11'-0" in width and 5'-6" in depth, having a pair of Doric wooden columns on either side of the passageway has replaced the original porch.

Openings - Entrance: 3'-0" x 6'-8" white four-panel door. A side entrance into the front parlor

(east elevation) has been removed.

Windows: D.H. 1/1 wood windows having arched head and a decorative keystone. There are two bay windows in the front facade, each with three windows and each projecting outward from the building at an angle for a distance of 3'-7"; the front portion is also 3'-7".

Windows are balanced in all elevations. Above the front entry there are two D.H. windows having a 2 light transom set in a brick arched opening. Other windows are single units. One dormer of two D.H. windows is centrally located in the front facade. The central double windows on the second floor front have been changed to the present single door with 15 lights framed by four rectangular lights either side. The 2 light transom was changed to 4 radial lights.

Roof - hipped on the front and side elevations, with a gable roof for the two story kitchen-bedroom projection to the north. The main roof of the house had at one time a captain's walk. This was later remodeled into a cupola, which in turn was removed in 1928. The roof was copper sheeted.

Chimneys - four brick chimneys, two on the east and two on the west.

INTERIOR

The room arrangement has been altered slightly from its original layout, particularly on the first floor. In 1898 a bedroom was added, and much later a den to the northwest of the building. In 1928, the partition between the first floor living room and an original bedroom was removed and the space used to enlarge the living room and make a downstairs bathroom.

Floor Plan - The front door gave access to a long, narrow entry hall from which led to the second floor. To the right of the entry was the parlor (southeast corner of the building). Behind

(north) the parlor was the dining room, and beyond that was the kitchen which projected out from the main building in a 16'-0" x 16'-0" wing. To the west of the entry hall was the living room and behind that a bedroom. In 1928, the partition between these was removed to make a larger living room with a bath behind it. Such changes were difficult because the interior partitions of the building were plastered brick walls.

The second floor had a hallway similar to that of the first floor. In the front of the building were two large corner bedrooms, and a third bedroom in the northeast corner, with a bath opposite in the northwest corner of the second floor. A fourth upstairs bedroom was over the kitchen projection.

A full basement was under the house.

Fireplaces - two, one in each of the front parlor rooms. They are concealed, with only the hearth opening of brick visible.

Stairway - open; oak balustrade.

Floor - oak planks 6" wide, carpets; T & G pine in the second floor bedrooms.

Wall and Ceiling Finish - plaster, and some wallpaper. The interior walls were brick finished with plaster; some covered with wallpaper.

Doors - four panel.

Trim - all elaborately moulded hardwood.

Hardware - brass, and some cast iron.

Lighting - originally gas; now electric.

Heating - originally fireplaces and room stoves.

OTHER

General Setting - The handsome building is bounded by North Tracy Avenue on the east, Mendenhall Street on the south, an alley on the north and a city parking lot on the west. The present grounds are but a small portion of the original acreage owned by Mr. Tracy.

Enclosure - According to an early photograph, a white picket fence enclosed a large section of land. Today the fence is gone.

Outbuildings - two; one is a garage (originally a carriage house), and the other was originally an office. These are located to the north and west of the main building.

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